

THE JEWEL OF JAFF JEWELL

Drawings by A. Howland

By ELMORE ELLIOTT PEAKE

HE was a squat, stooped little man, with a shambling, simian gait, a tangle of whiskers and hair, butternut jeans, slouch hat, and a pair of blue eyes that shone through his shaggy brows like violets in a brush heap. He lived back in the Ozarks, on a domelike hill known as Honey Mountain.

Few had ever seen his retreat; but it was described by those who had as a loop-holed log cabin with a projecting second story, blockhouse style, and a ten-foot stockade all around it which bristled with "No Admittance!" signs in crudely printed letters.

Yet Jaff was not exactly a hermit; for once a month or so he appeared in Morning Sun, driving a span of diminutive, long-eared, harness-galled mules. Sometimes he brought in a load of corn, or a rack of hogs, or a couple of calves. Again his only produce was a sack of herbs—ginseng, bloodroot, yellow puccoon, podophyllum—which was exchangeable for either cash or merchandise at Holstlaw's general store.

He never failed to call at the express office on his visits to town, and seldom failed to find a package. In fact, no one at Morning Sun received so many packages as this man who holed up in the mountains like a bear. For years their contents had been a source of speculation around the cracker barrels and cannon stoves of the village stores; and even Ed Bucks, the express agent, was unable to clear up the mystery.

"It's this way," said Ed to a circle of intimates one night: "All his stuff comes from mail order houses, which sell anything from needles to hay presses. But take it from me that the bulk of his parcels contain firearms. I've handled enough guns and ammunition to know their feel, even through wood. Besides, only last week a box came through so damaged that I could read the print on a carton of .30-caliber automatic cartridges with Spitzer bullets—which shows that Jaff, though he may belong to the feudal ages in other respects, is up to the minute on shooting irons."

JAFF confirmed this story on his very next trip to town by inadvertently dropping a .45 automatic pistol to the ground as he climbed into his wagon. Sheriff Bill Bates, the nearest man, picked it up for him.

"Some gun, Jaff!" observed Bill, running an admiring eye over the sinister beauty of the blued-steel engine of death.

"She's a pleasant-shootin' little weapin'," admitted the embarrassed Jaff in his soft, womanish voice.

Morning Sun was a gun-loving, gun-toting community, and the unique weapon was, as a matter of course, passed from hand to hand for inspection. Ben Gowdy, a crack shot, voiced the general opinion.

"A killer, no doubt; but a cussed, square-handed, clumsy-lookin' assembly of metal to my eye for aimin'. Can you hold her down to anything closer than a general landscape effect?"

"Yes," said Jaff quietly, in spite of the laugh at his expense.

"Then hit that rooster yonder in three shots, and I'll pay for him."

Jaff glanced at the fowl, sixty-odd yards away, with a clear space of meadow beyond. Then, without leaving his seat or tightening the reins of the mules, he raised his hand like lightning, the automatic bellowed, and the rooster was a motionless heap of feathers.

"Mere luck!" declared Gowdy testily, as the laugh was now turned on him. "How many shots you got left?"

"Six."

"Turn 'em into that flock, and if you get two or better I'll pay the damages and buy drinks for the crowd."

"I don't like to kill dumb creatures for sport," demurred Jaff.

"Don't worry!" sneered Gowdy. "They'll be e't."

Leaping to the ground with the agility of a boy, Jaff hunched forward and flashed his pistol into position again. What followed was in effect a continuous roar, so swift was the succession of shots; and when the thunder had ceased five more chickens lay on the sward. The astonished spectators ran forward to examine the hits, as if suspecting some hocuspocus. When they returned to drink at Gowdy's expense Jaff's wagon was rumbling across Osage Creek, beyond the last house in town, where the highway, after its brief trapping-out as Main street, again resumed the humble role of a red-clay country road.

THE group, after picking up Judge Hare, in his silk hat and white vest that was never quite white except on Sunday morning, lined up at the bar of the Sterling Price House for straight whisky, and then leisurely flowed out to the easy chairs on the veranda. Eight or ten pairs of feet settled on the railing like a row of crows, and the discussion of Jaff Jewell continued.



"And still he showed no signs of weakening."

"Some people out Honey Mountain way, who have missed chickens and shotes, are inclined to think Jaff has a turn for night work," observed Pony Smith.

"A lie!" declared Judge Hare, lighting one of the long black stogies that he bought by the thousand. "Jaff's simply poor and friendless, therefore an ideal scapegoat. He's eccentric, of course. Twenty years of solitude would make most of us eccentric. I remember well the first time I saw him. He drove up and tied to that same rack in front of Holstlaw's where he tied this morning. Same mules and same duds too, apparently."

"Nobody knew his name then nor for months afterward, until he appeared in town one day and timidly inquired for a preacher. The boys badgered him a little, asking if a justice wouldn't do as well, but finally directed him to the Methodist parsonage. Stanley Pierce was the pastor then,—one of nature's noblemen. Jaff, in evident embarrassment, told Stanley he had a little job for him out his way. So Stanley put on a clean lawn tie, stuck a blank marriage certificate in his pocket, and climbed into Jaff's wagon."

The Judge puffed reflectively, and poked a fat hand at a crumb of ash that had lodged in a crease of his white vest, thereby adding another smudge to its checkered surface.

"Stanley stepped into the cabin and saw a home-made coffin across two chairs, and that was his first

intimation that he was expected to officiate at a funeral and not a wedding. He said it was the saddest funeral he ever attended. He stood on one side of the box, Jaff sat on the other, and those two constituted the total attendance.

"Outside, though, a little girl four or five years old was playing with her dolls, and all the time that Stanley preached she sang; a little lullaby, Stanley said, which all but put his voice out of commission. Then those two men carried the coffin out into the dooryard and lowered it into the grave, with a squall of hominy snow pattering on the bare lid; and the only words that Jaff spoke were, 'Mister, this is some blow to me. How much is your bill?' Stanley wept when he related the circumstances to me the next day; yet he had been a chaplain in the army and had buried his thousands."

The Judge, leaning forward and fumbling in the wrinkled skirts of his frock coat, drew forth a voluminous, perfumed silk handkerchief and blew his nose vigorously.

"It was a year later, almost to the day, when Jaff called on Stanley again. That time they buried the little girl. Gentlemen, experiences like that twist a man!"

THE twenty-third of December dawned on Morning Sun without a trace of frost; and with it, as if he had hitched his old wagon to the flaming car of Phœbus, came Jaff Jewell. He was waiting at the door of the

express office when Ed Bucks got down. But this time, though the floor was piled with Christmas gifts, there was no parcel for Jaff.

He turned pale and said huskily, "Air you sure, Mr. Bucks? It had ought to have been here a week ago."

"It may come in on No. 3 this afternoon," said Ed.

Jaff had always scuttled back home like a rabbit to its brushpile the instant his business in town was finished; but today he waited for No. 3, shuffling restlessly up and down the sidewalks with his odd, side-wise gait hour after hour, pausing before the gay holiday windows if no one was near, moving on if anyone, even a child, approached, and crossing the street to avoid every knot of men.

At eleven o'clock he ate two buns, sitting on a secluded bench in the courthouse square, renewed his perambulations, and when No. 3 brought him nothing drove off in the early dusk, drooping on his wagon seat like an image of despair.

It was twelve miles to Honey Mountain; yet Bucks, getting down an hour earlier the next morning on account of the Christmas rush, again found Jaff waiting

effects his amiability evaporated; his baby-blue eyes burned ominously; his skin took on a congested, purplish hue; and presently, when the fires within impelled him to peel his coat, he exposed an automatic pistol in each pocket and a shoulder holster under each arm.

Carrying concealed weapons was almost as common a practice in Morning Sun as carrying jack knives; but not since the aftermath of the Civil War and Jesse James' reign of terror had a walking arsenal appeared in her streets. The excitement was considerable, spiced with amusement. Yet not everybody was amused.

"Watch that man!" said Doc Freeman sharply to Sheriff Bates, from the door of his office opposite the Sterling Price House. "I know the type. Alcohol has turned a devil loose. If he begins to shoot, crape will go to a premium in this town inside of thirty minutes. But don't arrest him unless you have to."

"I'm not likely to," answered Bates. "I'd a mite rather trim the ingrowing toenails of a catamount. But if that package of his don't come on No. 5, he's goin' to cut up some."

The package came, and none was better pleased than

Ed Bucks; for while he ran through the fat sheaf of Christmas waybills with shaky fingers, Jaff Jewell, still coatless and bulging with shooting irons, sprawled insolently across the counter, wafting alcoholic fumes into the agent's nose and gimpling him with a pair of blood-shot, red-rimmed, diabolical little eyes. Bill Bates and a deputy stood just inside the door of a back room, clubs in hand; but the nearest spectators this time were across the street, conveniently near the covered outside stairway leading up to the Odd Fellows' hall.

The package was a substantial wooden box. The sight of it at once placated Jaff, and lifting it to his shoulder he bade the agent an affable good-night.

Attached to the waybill was a slip of paper which Bucks was still staring at when the valorous group from across the street filed in—after hearing Jaff's wagon rumble across the bridge.

"Here's a memorandum from an inspector at St. Louis regarding that parcel Jaff just carried out," exclaimed Bucks. "It says, 'Case inclosing this shipment damaged in wreck out of Chicago and contents repacked here. Preserve list in

case of claim for loss.' Now listen if you don't believe our little Jaff can go some as a Christmas shopper:

- "1 pc flowered silk
- 1 pc white goods
- 2 pr woman's silk hose
- 6 dolls
- 16 bx cartridges
- 1 book (Second Reader)
- 2 bolts ribbon (pink and blue)"

The laugh that followed was not spontaneous. The huge, sorrel-topped Sheriff with the kindly Celtic eyes made no pretense of sharing it.

"Poor little cuss!" he said soberly. "Crazy as a bed-bug. Two cents' worth of dry bread for his dinner today and no supper tonight; yet all that flummery for a wife and child that have been under the sod for twenty years! How do I know it? Because it couldn't be for anybody else. He's never passed ten words with any woman or child living in Hickory township."

Conversation lagged. The men dispersed one by one. It was a moonlight night, as soft as May. "Six dolls!" murmured Cy Winkler to himself. Cy was in the habit of leaving Christmas purchases to his wife; but presently he walked over to Horner's and bought a doll for his six-year-old girl and a toy automobile for his little boy. About the same time Cal Botsford, the deputy Sheriff, across the street in Holstlav's, was exchanging two twenty-five-cent embroidered handkerchiefs for a two-dollar pair of woman's gloves and an aluminum coffeepot. As Cal passed out he heard Wick Walker, who had no children, say to a clerk in an undertone, "Henry, what you got for about a dollar and a half that would make a nice present for that lame boy of Ellen Wetherill's?"

ALL three men went home lighter of heart; but long after they were asleep the queer little man to whom, consciously or unconsciously, they owed this lightness, was still urging his tired mules through the foothills.

Either ashamed of his spree or haunted by the fear, as he had hinted to Bucks, that someone meant

him harm, Jaff did not appear again at Morning Sun for over three months. He tarried only long enough to buy a few groceries. This was on Saturday. The next morning, Easter Sunday, the town was stunned by news of the murder of Horace Search and his wife, an aged couple living alone on a farm.

Robbery was evidently the motive of the crime, the old man having sold half a dozen head of steers on Saturday to an itinerant stock buyer. Who had knowledge of this sale and of the fact that Horace had not come to town to deposit the proceeds? This was the question discussed in the automobile which, inside of an hour after receipt of the news, was humming toward the scene of the tragedy, carrying Sheriff Bates, four deputies, and a brace of bloodhounds. The Searches' nearest neighbor was Conrad Kamschulte, a thrifty German of unimpeachable character. The next nearest neighbor was Jaff Jewell. But none of the men in the car cared to be the first to make this suggestion.

The bloodhounds, being given the scent from a towel found between the house and the barn, on which the murderer had presumably dried his hands, circled the premises a few times and then led off, baying excitedly and lunging against their chains. They headed straight for Kamschulte's; but old Conrad, stolidly sucking his carved meerschaum pipe, explained that his hired man had been over to Search's early that morning to borrow some axle grease, and had helped himself without waking the old folks, who were known to sleep late of a Sunday.

So a fresh start was made. This time the dogs headed up Bois d'Arc Creek and nosed along its sinuous course until they intersected the narrow, rutted wagon-road leading up Honey Mountain—to the tumbled, eroded acres of Jaff Jewell's poor little farm.

Bates halted the party in the forest, a quarter of a mile from Jaff's cabin.

"I don't for a minute believe that Jaff did it, you understand," said he; "but under the circumstances we'll have to arrest him. It won't be a kid-glove job, and if we use our heads now we may save our hides later."

The words had barely left his mouth when a rifle cracked up the slope. One of the hounds spasmodically leaped into the air and landed on its back, motionless except for the tremulous reflexing of its legs in death. The men jumped for cover.

IT was the fifth day of the siege. Some progress had been made. The stockade, by means of ropes attached under cover of darkness, had been gapped on three sides of the cabin, giving the besiegers so many unobstructed zones of fire. The six-pound brass howitzer that Bates had borrowed from the army post at Jefferson Barracks had stripped most of the clapboards from the roof, shattered the heavy doors and shutters, dismantled the well-sweep, brought down the outside stick-and-clay chimney in clouds of dust, and splintered the log walls.

Nevertheless the enemy showed no signs of weakening. His fire continued a marvel of accuracy. An exposed foot or elbow on the firing line—still two hundred yards away—instantly elicited a shot. Six of the original posse of twenty-four had been retired, one with a perforated hand, two minus a finger, a fourth with a ball in his shoulder, another with a shattered ankle, and the last with a nicked ear. Three others had been hauled back to town suffering from a mysterious disease which Doc Freeman dryly diagnosed as "army colic."

Sheriff Bates, in a camp sheltered by a ledge of rocks, sat down to a breakfast of bacon, fried eggs, and muddy coffee. His mood was savage. He had just had a wrangle with two newspaper correspondents whose despatches had held him up to ridicule, and had ended by ordering the whole corp of correspondents back to Kamschulte's, with sulphurous threats to shoot the first one who should again appear on the scene of operations.

"Here we are on the fifth day," he growled, "still poppin' away at two hundred yards, with half a dozen wounded, a running expense of sixty dollars a day for deputies, twice that much for rifle ammunition, and God knows how much more for that government gun! Hot campaign stuff for me next fall! Newspaper reporters are rollin' in here from all over the country, like bums to a barbecue, and now comes the suggestion from the Enterprise to call on the Governor for a company of militia,—all to whip one man, and him no bigger than my twelve-year-old boy! Somebody will be suggestin' the regular army by tomorrow."

"Well, do you know anything better?" asked Hod Church glumly. His feet were wet, his shoulder sore from the kick of his rifle, and he had lost his upper plate the day before in changing his base at jackrabbit speed.

"Yes," thundered the Sheriff. "I'm going to smoke him out—build a fire against his cabin and burn it down."

"It will be light, congenial work for anyone out of employment—carryin' the stuff up and pilin' it against the walls without disturbing Jaff. I presume it's your

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"The deputy was in the back room—waiting."

at the door; for there was a nine A. M. train which carried express.

"Nothing again," announced Bucks, and he added, "I'm sorry."

Jaff, with the wistful eyes of a hungry dog, followed the agent in. "Mr. Bucks," he all but whispered, "could anybody be holding that package back to spite me?"

"Who'd want to spite you?"

The shaggy little man hesitated. "There air some who would," said he darkly. "There air some who would follow me here from distant parts to do me harm, if they knew where I lived. Mr. Bucks, I've got to have that package today!"

"Why?" asked Ed blandly, but very curious.

Jaff glanced about him, as if suspecting hidden foes. "Because—because tomorrer is Christmas!" he exclaimed excitedly.

THE story quickly spread over Main street, being too good a thing for the loquacious Bucks to keep to himself. Jaff Jewell, chafing over a belated Christmas package, was as funny as a polar bear growling over a backward spring. Hence, when the express wagon returned from the three-twenty train—Jaff having again remained in town—half a dozen men had dropped into the office to see the fun.

Jaff stood in a corner like an animal at bay, licking his lips and shooting suspicious glances at the onlookers. When Bucks ran through the waybills and again announced nothing for him he seemed stunned for a moment. Then faltering out, "I'll wait for the nine o'clock train," he rushed from the room.

Never before, to Morning Sun's knowledge, had he taken a drink; but he now shambled swiftly across the street and vanished behind the swinging doors of O'Mara's saloon. He went in a lamb; he came out twenty minutes later a lion. He swaggered up and down the street, laughing and chatting with anybody who would give him ear, salaaming to the women, buying candy for the children.

But as the poison worked around to its secondary

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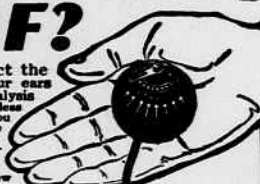
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The Associated Sunday Magazines

52 East Nineteenth Street
New York City

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idea to send him up a sleeping powder, to be taken immediately after supper, in a third of a glass of water," Hod grinned toothlessly.

"Don't worry," snapped the Sheriff. "You won't be asked to take any chances. I'll find a full-sized man for the job—if there's one in the county."

"And after he's smoked out what's your program?"

"Shoot him down like a dog—unless he surrenders," answered Bates with Napoleonic grimness.

Hod pared himself a slice of tobacco. "Another easy thing, in the dead of night, with Jaff on the lope and working the triggers of fifty-seven varieties of man-killing inventions."

BUT Bates was not to be ridiculed out of his strategy, in spite of his own misgivings, and at midnight the execution of it began. Baled hay, chopped into portable sections and soaked with kerosene, was the tinder selected.

"Now, Men," said the Sheriff solemnly to the assembled deputies, "a word before you go back to your posts. This is war—and war is hell, as old Sherman said. I don't want you to think of the Jaff Jewell you've always known, or the Jaff of last Christmas, who touched our hearts with the gifts for imaginary people. Think of the fiend who in cold blood brained old man Search and his wife, and when he comes out, in the light of the fire, close up and shoot him down—unless he should be unarmed and making unmistakable signs of surrender."

It was repugnant work for men most of whom would have balked at drowning out a woodchuck; but each one dutifully shouldered his portion of hay, and the line, lighted only by the stars twinkling through the half-grown leaves above, wound noiselessly to a point within a hundred yards of their ultimate goal.

Dan Kelsey, the farmer's boy who had volunteered for the hazardous part of the program, continued up the hillside with his bundle of hay, in the direction of Jaff's fortress. The others waited with quickened hearts; for discovery unquestionably meant death for the youth. Kelsey, however, returned in safety—not once but again and again.

On his eighth or ninth trip, though, he was gone longer than usual, and presently there showed between the black boles of the trees a glow that quickly waxed into a leaping mass of flames. Bates ground out an imprecation between set teeth, and when Kelsey finally reappeared savagely demanded an explanation of the premature ignition.

"I didn't light it," answered the youth, breathing heavily. "Jaff done it, after pushin' the hay back from the wall."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes. When I got up there he was standin' back in the shadder of a tree."

"Then why in the name of God didn't you shoot him?" bellowed the Sheriff.

Kelsey, with downcast eyes, was dumb for an interval. Then he answered with twitching lips, "Because—because he didn't shoot me when he had a chance to."

Bates glared at the delinquent for a moment, but spoke in a milder tone than was expected. "You are young, Dan—too young for man hunting. We'll excuse you from further service. The stuff is off, Men. Go to bed."

At eight o'clock the next morning the spiteful barking of the hand-arms and the sullen detonations of the howitzer began again, silencing the sweet whistle of meadow larks, frightening the cardinals from thicket to thicket on flaming wings, and poisoning April's sylvan incense with the acrid fumes of burnt powder. The theory that the high velocity .30's would riddle the cabin like a hatbox had long since been exploded; but it was still hoped that out of the swarm of steel-jacketed bullets there might be one that, in its chance-guided, incalculable deflections, would search out the body of Jaff Jewell.

ABOUT half-past eight Dan Kelsey, in a broad-brimmed hickory hat and top boots, entered the camp with an embarrassed air.

The Sheriff, opening a case of ammunition, paused with a brusque "Well?"

"Mr. Bates," began the youth shyly, "there was something else I had ought to have told you last night, but I didn't dast for fear you wouldn't believe me. There was another reason why I didn't shoot Jaff. It—it was because a woman was standin' beside him, holding his hand."

"A woman!" snorted Bates. "You've

made that story up, Dan, to let yourself down easy—or else you were seein' things."

"No, Sir," protested Kelsey stoutly. "I seen her as plain in the firelight as I see you now. She was a young woman, as purty as a picture, dressed in a low-cut gown, with a string of pearls around her neck and a kind of a crown on her head. And she was laughin'! I couldn't sleep last night for thinkin' about that laugh, when it would have been more natural for her to cry; and when the guns began to crack this morning I left my horses in the furrow to ride over here and tell you about her. I had to. 'Tain't right to fire on that house with an innocent woman in it."

"You saw the Queen of the May or some other fairy," answered the Sheriff mockingly. "Run back to your plow, Danny, take a pill on retiring tonight, and by morning you'll be yourself again."

Nevertheless his mind had leaped back to Christmas Eve and Jaff's Christmas box, and after Kelsey had gone he began to nibble his stubby red mustache. If there really was a woman in Jaff's cabin, it would make a mighty unpleasant newspaper story—for himself. He turned nervously at the snapping at a twig behind him.

"We've got him!" cried Cal Botsford. "At least he's out in front of his cabin waving a white handkerchief."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Bates fervently. He leaped to his feet, felt in his hip pocket to make sure of his bracelets, and started up the slope, with Botsford in his wake.

JAFF, standing in front of his battered castle, presented a pitiable sight. The .30-.30's had evidently done considerable rummaging around inside. One bloody bandage encircled his head and another his right wrist; his left leg was tied round with a handkerchief above his knee; hands and face were as black as a miner's from powder stains, and hair and whiskers were singed.

"You can have the girl now—what's left of her," said he with simple pathos, a mere hint of tragedy.

Enigmatical as the words were to Cal Botsford, sudden sweat beaded the Sheriff's brow, and his hand came out of his pocket without the steel cuffs. Motioning Botsford to wait outside, he followed Jaff in.

The floor was ankle deep with plaster, broken glass, splinters, scraps of wall paper, and exploded shells. But what enchained the Sheriff's eyes was a bed in the corner upon which a young woman lay, clothed much as Kelsey had described her. Her eyes were shut, her face deathly white, and one temple was crossed with a trickle of blood.

"Dead?" whispered Bates, from a dry throat.

"Dying," answered Jaff calmly.

Bates jumped to the door. "Doc Freeman—quick!" said he thickly to Botsford. "He's at Kamschulte's, dressing Bob's shoulder. Tell him it's a matter of life or death. But don't mention this gal yet—for there is a girl. And tell the boys," he added, at sight of the ingathering deputies, "to keep outside."

He turned back into the room. Jaff, occupying a chair from which one arm and half the back had been shot away, motioned him toward another one in scarcely better repair.

I HID her well for nigh onto twenty years," said Jaff, like a man resuming a story. "Her mother in Heaven will bless me for that. Only one man in this county ever seen her. That was the minister that buried her mother. I realized afterward it was a mistake to let him see her, and I corrected it by having him out here the next year to bury Ruby. Of course he didn't bury her: only a box with some stones in it."

"Yet I always felt it in my bones that some day this thing would come to pass. Secrets, you know, will always out in time; and I made up my mind, with God as my counselor, to kill her before I'd let anybody take her to a living death in a 'sylum. But that would have been a grievous hard thing for a father to do, and I'm glad to be spared the pain."

Bates was not a man of subtle intuitions; but it was dawning upon him that he had made a ghastly mistake. The thought set up a tremor in the big hairy hands which clasped his hat; but all he could do just then was to moisten his stiff lips and nod dully in recognition of Jaff's words.

"I don't feel resentful towards you," continued the little man in a soft, covert tone that wrenched the big man's guilty

heart. "The law required you to get her, and you're an officer of the law. The law got her once before, about a year after she'd fell down the cellar steps, which brought her trouble on. We'd ought to have kept her screened then, her mammy and me; but, not knowin' about the law, we let her play out with the other children, back there in West Virginny—and one day an officer come and took her away to the 'sylum."

"He said we was too poor to give her proper care. We was poor, Nanny and me, along of my drinkin'; but we fed our little Ruby more than the 'sylum people did. We kept her cleaner, and never skimmed her clothes in the wintertime, or made her sleep in a bed that was alive with vermin. When I found those things out, Mister, I could hear that child crying for her mammy in my dreams; and always bein' a hand to do what I thought was right, regardless of the cost, I stole her back one day when she was playing in the 'sylum yard, and we lit out that night for the West."

"She's been a care. I've been her daddy and her mammy both. I've made all her clothes, and her doll clothes too. I've done the cooking and kept the house—and kept it right; though you wouldn't think so from the way it looks now. I've run the farm. In twenty years I've never spent a night from under this roof, or took a meal out till last Christmas time. I've bought books to study up on her case." He nodded toward a bullet-ridden shelf of books.

"But I don't count it a hardship, mind you. She's paid me back a hundredfold—something she mightn't have done if she'd been clothed in her right mind. She's drawn me closer to God. She saved me from liquor. I've never felt but once since her mammy died. That was last Christmas, when I was upset about her gifts not gettin' here; also worried because I thought the law was on our trail again."

"I built that high fence to keep her in when I was out in the fields; for like a mischievous child she was fond of running away. She got out last Saturday night for the first time. I missed her at daylight, and didn't find her till about eight o'clock. She was setting down by the creek, looking at the pictures in a newspaper. My heart jumped; for I knew she'd been to some house, and when I looked at the label on the paper I saw it come from Search's."

HE paused and passed his hand over his bandaged head, as if it ached. Bates mopped his brow and glanced at the motionless figure on the bed. It was she, then, whom the dogs had trailed! It was she who—but the grisly thought sickened him, and a profound pity for the hapless and unsuspecting father swept over him. Then Jaff's monologue began again.

"I was afeerd somebody had seen her. I knew she'd attract attention; for she don't dress like the women around here. She always loved pretty clothes, and I always kept her in plenty. So I was on my guard, and when I seen you coming with your dogs I knew it was her you wanted."

"Mister," the first break came in his voice, "if you had known her, you'd never have wanted to take her to the 'sylum. She'd fade in a 'sylum like a spring beauty tore up by the roots. She lived on sunshine and fresh air and flowers, just like a bee or a bird. The little she e't seemed skasily enough to keep her soul and body together. She wasn't like any other crazy person you ever saw. She never did anybody or anything harm. I never knew her to mash a bug. She was always happy, laughing and singing all day long and kissing me a hundred times, and always bringin' in young things, like kittens and pups and lambs. I've known her to take off her clothes to swaddle a cold lamb. She was as pure as a drop of dew, as sweet as a rose, and she had the privileges of angels and goddesses and babes."

"Seems strange, Mister, to call a person like that crazy. Seems like she ought to be called a saint. Seems like, if we're children of our Heavenly Father, that the ones who ain't innocent and who don't sing and laugh and play all day long, ought to be called the crazy ones."

Suddenly covering his face with his hands, he began to weep softly. Bates, hearing the trample of a horse, was glad of an excuse to step outside.

NEWS for you, Sheriff," said the physician crisply, removing the lavender, undressed kids in which he drove on the hottest summer day. "You've been barking up the wrong tree. Kamschulte's hired man is the murderer. He left last night at midnight. One of Kamschulte's boys, coming home from sparking a girl, saw him and roused the house. They followed him, caught him, and found the gold certificates

in his carpetbag that the stock buyer paid to old man Search. I'm sorry for you, Bill."

"You'll be sorrier," said Bates wretchedly, "when I tell you that we've wounded a woman—fatally, I fear. She's Jaff's daughter—the one that Stanley Pierce thought he buried twenty years ago. And she's crazy."

Freeman arched his grizzled brows, whistled softly, and entered the cabin. When he emerged ten minutes afterward his stocky figure moved at unwonted speed. He scrambled into the saddle again, dug the heels of his Congress gaiters into the horse's flanks, and as he galloped off called out something about Kamschulte's and telephoning to town. Had it been anyone but Doc Freeman, the onlookers would have pronounced him excited.

He was back in twenty minutes and, stripped of coat and vest, hovered first over the girl and then Jaff. Forty minutes later an automobile panted up the steep road. It contained Mary Halloran, Morning Sun's single graduate nurse, in a faultlessly pressed tailored suit and a chic little turban to match; a wicker suitcase marked with her initials in oxidized silver; three battered, bulging leather bags that everybody recognized as Doc Freeman's; an instrument case and several packages done up in the yellow wrapping paper of Koehler's drugstore.

BATES, after tacking a sheet across the doorless doorway, joined the men outside. "I don't feel as if I'd ever care to smoke or eat or do anything else again if that girl dies," said he wearily as he refused a cigar.

"What does Doc say?" asked someone. "Nothing, as usual, except that he's got to perform an operation on her skull—where the bullet struck her, no doubt."

"He might have loosened up for once," complained another. "Where's Jaff?"

"In the kitchen, boiling water. I offered to do it; but he said he wanted to keep busy—with six gunshot wounds! Gentlemen, I take my hat off to Jaff Jewell from now on!"

The unhappy Bates finally bent his steps toward the kitchen, where Jaff, wearing an apron and decorated afresh by Freeman with bandages and adhesive plaster, was scalding half a dozen chickens in a bucket of steaming water.

"I thought I'd get up a chicken pie dinner for you folks," he explained.

"No need of that, Jaff," answered the Sheriff hastily. "There's plenty to eat down at the camp, only nobody seems to have thought of eating."

"It's been sometime since I've had company," said Jaff; "but I ain't forgot what hospitality is."

For a moment the Sheriff watched him

pluck the fowls, then said awkwardly, "Jaff, listen to the confession of a conscience-stricken man."

Jaff heard it with a curious immobility of countenance, without pausing in his work. The Sheriff concluded, "It was a terrible mistake for me to make, Jaff. I hope you will be able sometime to forgive me."

Jaff filled the dishpan with cold water and began to cut up the chickens before answering. "Don't take on," he then said. "I hold you no more responsible for this than I would a hailstorm that slithered up my young corn. God is back of everything that comes to pass; therefore everything is for the best. My life has been a happy one. I've had joys that I reckon few people ever have. Maybe I couldn't make myself plain to you if I tried. If God wants to draw the curtain now, I'll abide by His will!"

THE chickens had stewed till the touch of a fork separated meat from bone, and the crust for the pies was all rolled out, when Doc Freeman, clad in a surgeon's gown and operating gloves, appeared at the door to the front room.

"Jaff," said he, "your girl is going to live, and unless I am gravely mistaken she will be restored to reason as well as to health."

Jaff stiffened, like a man shot through with a high voltage current.

"Yes," continued the doctor. "A little piece of bone no bigger than a pea—the nurse will show it to you—has stood between her and rationality all these years. Those asylum doctors back in West Virginia ought to be hung, one and all, for not finding it out. By a chance that seems almost a miracle the bullet that knocked her senseless did not enter her skull, but blazed a path through her hair that led my fingers to the spot where the bit of bone pressed upon the cortex."

Jaff still stood dumb, mechanically moving his lips without sound. "Will—will she know me," finally came in husky tones, "or will she take me for a stranger?"

"She'll know you."

"Will she be—ashamed of me, do you think?" He clenched his hard little hands.

Freeman smiled beneficently through a mist of tears. "She'll not be ashamed of you," said he. "She won't be so much changed as you imagine. I shouldn't be surprised if she still played with her dolls for awhile. You see, Jaff, she's still a little girl mentally. You'll have to teach her the things she ought to know."

Jaff smiled pathetically. "I can do that. And I'd rather she'd grow to be a woman sort of gradual. Otherwise it would be—it would be almost as if she'd died."

SHEEP'S CLOTHING

Continued from page 12

a stroke of apoplexy—or something. I'm no doctor.

"How did it happen?"

"He was coming downstairs," Mrs. Ellsworth replied with difficulty.

Quoin interrupted brusquely, "What was he doing upstairs, please?"

"His daughter—talking to her."

"She's up there now? Safe? Unmolested?"

"Locked in the sitting room—safe, yes."

"Doesn't know of this as yet—eh?"

"No. With the door closed, the room is sound proof. Besides, there was no noise."

"Go on. How did he come here, and why did he send his daughter on ahead?"

"If you please," the woman begged, "one moment. I am fearfully shocked."

"Take your time," Quoin consented.

AND while she turned away and, with a handkerchief pressed to her lips, struggled to recollect herself, the detective explained to Peter in an undertone, "Widow of one Ellsworth, in his day a world-known collector of stolen property—I mean a fence, of course. Always lived most respectably—much as you see. Craven probably did a lot of business with him first and last, and afterward with Mrs. Ellsworth, who carried on the business in a smaller way, but quite as successfully, as far as keeping out of trouble was concerned. Feeling better, Mrs. Ellsworth?"

"Yes—thank you. Mr. Craven called up about half-past ten to say his daughter was coming to see me, bringing with her a valuable property,—I have no idea what,—and that I was to find some pretext to detain her until he followed. She got here about eleven in a taxicab with this gentleman. When she heard Mr. Craven was coming she refused to wait, and I had to lock her in the room to keep her. Mr. Traft—I'm sorry—I put off with a note ostensibly from her. When Mr. Craven came he went directly to the girl. While he was upstairs two men of

my acquaintance came to the basement door, and I let them in."

"Southpaw Smith and Colonel Gordon?"

"Yes. Mr. Craven had—business relations with them, I believe. They forced their way upstairs, declaring they must see him. When he came down they were waiting for him in here—in shadow. Smith stepped out and said something to him in a low tone—I didn't hear. Mr. Craven shook his head and made an inaudible reply. Smith lost his temper at that, and said aloud, 'You lie! Permit me to present you with this token of our esteem.'"

"And that was—" Quoin prompted.

"This," said the woman, pointing down to Craven's clenched right hand.

With an exclamation of surprise Quoin bent over and, after some difficulty with the stiffening fingers, stood up, exhibiting a Knave of Spades.

"And then?"

"Nothing. They went away, Smith and Gordon, by the basement."

"There was a quarrel—blows were struck?"

"No. Mr. Craven said something to this effect, 'If that is your decision, very well—so be it!' Smith merely laughed unpleasantly, called Gordon, and turned down the basement stairs. Afterward I heard the gate slam as they left."

"And Craven—"

"He stood looking at the card, swaying and mumbling to himself. I wondered if he had been drinking. Then I noticed he was holding one hand to his side, as though his heart was paining him. I was alarmed, and asked if I could do anything. He looked at me as if he didn't know me, took a step or two this way, and suddenly fell as if he had been shot. And immediately I telephoned for a doctor—"

I UNDERSTAND, Mrs. Ellsworth. For an instant Quoin contemplated the Knave of Spades, frowning thoughtfully. "Odd," he

mused, looking up at Traft, "odd how these things run. It's not a month now since an Italian in a low coffee house up on 110th street left his chair for a minute, with his hat on it by way of reservation. When he returned and picked up the hat there was a playing card beneath it,—the death card,—in his case the Four of Hearts. Five minutes later he was shot dead where he sat. It only goes to show how the criminal imagination inclines to melodrama,—give your victim warning, so that he may die a dozen imaginary deaths before you kill him. In this case Craven's heart spoiled their fun; but the chances are he would never have got back to his hotel alive."

He paused, looked pityingly down at the dead man, sighed, "Well—poor devil!" then, unfolding a handkerchief, placed it gently over the livid and distorted mask. "Better not move him till the doctor comes; though I fancy we can save you the trouble of an inquest, Mrs. Ellsworth. And we'll do our best to keep it out of the papers. We'd better draw the portières while Peter gets Miss Craven out of the house. Yes, that's your job, Peter; but better not tell her anything until you get her away. Take her to Mrs. Beggarstaff—don't you think?"

"Yes," agreed Peter, "for a few days or weeks—as long as she needs to get over it."

"And then?" asked Quoin curiously.

"Why," said Peter in surprise, "didn't you know we were going to be married?"

THE END

["Sheep's Clothing" has been dramatized into a motion picture play by Thomas A. Edison, Inc. The story will be enacted in a two-reel film, which is scheduled for release September 18.]



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